

My Cannon Beach Dream

in memory of my grandmother

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I

A tiny baby spider as big as a fleck of black pepper jumps from her hatching place into the wind. She jumps without knowing and spins her first silken thread. The wind will carry her with her sticky thread until she crashes into the leaves of a tree or sticks to the side of a building or a cement truck, or until she falls helpless into the sea covered in her own sticky web. This particular baby spider somehow settles in a shady spot between the leaves of a tree where she is safe from the glare of the sun, safe from the beaks of those predators who would eat her.

II

In Prague recently, I rented an apartment on *Brehova Straha* in the *Mala Strana*: the Old Jewish Quarter. In Czech, *Brehova* is pronounced *Jehovah*. I lived on Jehovah Street. Czech people are extraordinarily friendly. I spoke at length with a young girl who was selling tickets to a Vivaldi concerto, which was being held that evening in the sanctuary of a prominent Protestant church. The young girl asked me where I was staying.

I said, "Jehovah Street."

Later at the concerto, six stringed instruments played *The Four Seasons*. The violinist looked like a potato farmer. Lean and wrinkled with thick gnarled fingers, he played the violin like he had done nothing else for a hundred years.

I walked back to my apartment on Jehovah Street in the Old Jewish Quarter, and in the doorway high up in the corner, a spider with a bulbous ivory-colored abdomen had spun a thick and intricate web. I thought of Athena, goddess of war and wisdom, to whom Zeus listened, protector and advisor of Odysseus, spinner of thread and weaver of cloth. I thought of the Fates, who like Athena spin and weave life's cloth, but unlike Athena spin with improvidence and cut threads recklessly.

III

On a sunny Friday morning, nearly a decade ago, I decided to leave my husband. I went to work and asked my supervisor for the day off. She asked why.

I said, "I've decided."

Shaking (with fear? elation? anger?), I told her in two and three-word sentences that I had about six hours to find someplace where I could go to be safe from him, someplace where he couldn't find me.

Right then, she and another co-worker drove me back to my apartment and helped me pack up my stuff—or rather, *they* packed up my stuff while I sat in the passenger seat holding onto to Jesse, my overly excitable terrier-mix puppy. Now that I think of it, Jesse was probably just excited to go for a ride. Everything I owned—furniture and all—fit into the back of a blue Ford Bronco. By lunchtime, I was sleeping in my supervisor's spare bedroom.

When I awoke the next morning, I called my mom.

Of course, she worried.

Then I called my dad.

He was, "worried as hell. Your husband has been calling all night."

I felt giddy. *Your husband has been calling all night.* That meant he didn't know where I was. That meant he was angry and there was nothing he could do about it. Maybe that meant he cared, but I shoved that thought from my mind. I could not afford to believe that he cared. Besides, I knew it wasn't true. I only *wanted* it to be true.

I'm free! Free, free! Free?

That's how I felt.

I also felt powerful, but my sense of power was rooted in feelings of fear and anger. Just as was his.

IV

We were divorced two-and-a-half years later.

People, when they learn of this, always ask and declare, "My god, *why* did you go back? *Why* did you stay? I would have left him the first instant he touched me."

I ask the same thing myself.

It's easy to say that you'd leave.

It's easy to say.

All I know is that my initial separation from him gave me a taste for the sweetness of freedom and the salt of power, but I was not ready to believe that those seasonings could be wholly mine. Unlike the baby spider, I could not jump into the wind and take my chances on sticking to the right kind of tree. Tangled in my own sticky web, I hadn't learned to spin and weave.

V

My grandmother had premonitions. When her brother left home, she saw him in her mind's eye falling into a dark hole. He died soon after in a "mining accident." In a dream that she dreamt near her middle age, she saw her sister asleep in a pool of water. Thirty years later, her sister died in the bathtub. Sometimes she'd see a color in her dream. Yellow. And then grandpa, who was a gardener by trade, would bring home a five-gallon bucket full of bright-yellow starry-headed dahlias. She knew when a fish was about to bite her line—or sometimes his. (This drove grandpa crazy.)

She would say, "You've got one there."

And as grandpa was guffawing and saying, "There ain't no fish on my line," the tip of his pole would jerk and dip.

VI

On Valentine's Day, after that first separation, I went to Cannon Beach on the Oregon Coast. Two girlfriends and I stayed in a condo above a pizza-by-the-slice place. It stormed and hailed the whole time. We stayed in our flannel pajamas and walked huddled together to the corner market for cheap wine, chick flicks and chocolate peanut butter ice cream.

No wonder I dreamt.

I dreamt of walking along the beach under a gray sky, the clouds so thin and futile that the anticipation of blue sky was almost better than actual blue sky. In my dream, I walked arm-in-arm with a man. He was tall and broadly built with brown hair and a gray-flecked beard. We embraced, and behind him I could see the tall rocks, like haystacks, just off the coast. I felt happy and safe.

I felt happy and safe.

When I told my girlfriends of my dream, they jokingly chided me for having erotic encounters with lumberjacks. I dropped the subject and promptly forgot about it.

VII

Two years ago in the springtime, divorced and living alone, I decided to go with a girlfriend to visit a mutual friend, a man, who lived in a tiny village on Washington's Pacific Coast. This man from the village is tall and broadly built, with brown hair and a gray-flecked beard. He took us for a day-walk along the pristine beach to see the famous haystack-like rocks.

During our long walk, the man and I talked. Blue sky threatened to peak out from behind thin gray clouds. We walked arm-in-arm, and when we reached the rocks, we embraced.

Later that evening, after our beach fire had burned down to a pile of glowing embers, I remembered my Cannon Beach dream; I realized that my dream had been a premonition, and that it had come true that afternoon.

VIII

The man from the village and I have been dating since that first walk on the beach, and I have felt safe and happy. I have been able to love—in the best way that I can—and I have been loved. I *am* loved. I've grown strong and independent. I am the baby spider napping in a sunny corner of her neat little web. I leapt without knowing I was leaping, and Athena has smiled upon me. It feels good here. It feels safe here.

At first, I thought that my Cannon Beach dream was my dream-man dream, the dream in which I met the person I would fall in love with and live with happily ever after. But I think that my Cannon Beach dream was simply a hopeful dream that pointed to a time when I would not fear to embrace someone.

IX

For Valentine's Day weekend of this last year, the man from the village took me to Cannon Beach. We stayed at a quirky bed-and-breakfast hotel, in a room with brightly-colored fish painted on the wall. Through the bay windows of our room, we could see Haystack Rock. We held hands, but we did not make love. We walked through the streets of the town, but we did not walk on the beach. We did not embrace in view of the rocks.

It felt like the finality of something. It felt like a circle closing.
I dreamt of waking up.